

**SUMMARY OF THE
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 1, 1999**

The On-Site Assessment Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference on Monday, February 1, 1999, at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). The meeting was led by its chair, Mr. Steven Baker of the Arizona Department of Health. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to discuss assessor checklists and training courses.*

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Baker began the meeting by drawing the committee's attention to an application for membership on the On-Site Assessment Committee that has been received. He commented that a replacement will be needed for a committee member whose term on the committee expires at NELAC V. Mr. Baker also noted that in a meeting with the Board of Directors following NELAC IVi, he had been made aware of policies concerning repeated absences from meetings and teleconferences. In light of these policies the committee discussed a possible replacement for another committee member and the committee agreed that an individual with radiochemistry experience would be preferable. Two possible replacements were mentioned.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CONCERNS

Mr. Baker summarized for the committee his meeting with the Board of Directors. The board expressed concerns at that time that the On-Site Assessment Committee is not moving fast enough on assessor checklists and training. The board also expressed concerns with the committee's use of method-specific checklists. Consequently, the committee will move away from method-specific assessor checklists. Mr. Baker told the committee that he had asked the board for specific guidance on this issue in writing. He also reminded the committee that all checklists are to be posted in draft form on the NELAC Website by March 1, 1999.

ASSESSOR CHECKLISTS

The committee reviewed the draft Gas Chromatography-Volatile Organic Compounds (GC-VOC) checklist distributed by Mr. Baker prior to the meeting. Mr. Baker noted that relevant quality systems (QS) items along with information from relevant methods have been incorporated. Since certain methods are going to be used by the majority of laboratories, the checklist still reflects some method-specific content. At least one committee member advocated removing even more method-specific content from the checklist. He suggested removing anything non-NELAC referenced in an attempt to move away from a specific method and to cover the portions of Chapter 5 (Quality Systems) that address all those things required of a method. Considerable committee discussion ensued regarding the distinction between "method" and laboratory "standard operating procedure" (SOP). It was noted that Chapter 5 requires a laboratory to have an SOP for their method. Committee members from the state regulatory sector noted that they need acceptance criteria against which to audit. They questioned whether Chapter 5 requires

laboratories to establish control charts and noted that control limits are based on data. Mr. Baker expressed the opinion that state assessors would make up their own method-specific checklists to use in conjunction with PBMS checklists and anticipated much discussion on the issue.

The committee conducted an informal straw poll about how the checklists should be written. Given the choices of purely method-specific, purely NELAC-referenced, or a composite of the two, the committee was almost evenly split between the regulatory and commercial sectors. Regulators leaned toward a composite approach in which a specific method would be included to some degree if that method is included in Chapter 5. Most of the nonregulators leaned more toward a purely NELAC-referenced approach. They felt that only those method-specific items essential to the data should be included. Only one committee member supported a purely NELAC-referenced approach without any method-specific inclusion.

Mr. Baker asked the committee to submit their written item-by-item comments on the GC-VOC checklist to him as soon as possible so that he can modify the checklist for discussion at the next scheduled teleconference. The committee agreed that those members who had worked on checklists would revisit them. It was noted that members need to contact Ms. Marlene Patillo to get the checklists.

TRAINING COURSES

Mr. Baker suggested that travel costs for training might be cut significantly if groups could utilize regional satellite training teleconference facilities. It was noted that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has this type of satellite training system. Ms. Jeanne Mourrain is checking into whether the system could be utilized by a third-party training group. It was also noted that a monitor would need to be on-hand at each training facility to give and collect tests, etc.

Mr. Baker noted that the Basic Training Course (BTC), which is just a review of the standards, is completed. It was noted that experience in setting up comparable training courses indicates that it would cost approximately \$250,000 to set up the course. This cost would include the production of all training materials and approval by the Registrar Accreditation Board (RAB). The \$250,000 price quote seemed excessive to several committee members. However, RAB approval alone would cost between \$10,000 and \$25,000. (The committee has not yet gotten much response from RAB concerning the development and approval of training courses.) Mr. Baker noted that the NELAC Board of Directors does not think the On-Site Assessment Committee has enough time to involve RAB in the BTC. Consequently, the BTC might have to be approved by the On-Site Assessment Committee, a subcommittee, or an ad hoc committee if RAB does not respond soon. The standard is not specific as to who will approve the course. It only states that the course will be approved.

Some committee discussion ensued regarding the cost of developing and administering the course. It was noted that the initial start-up cost is a one-time expense. The committee questioned whether EPA will provide start-up money, or whether the creator will provide start-up money and recoup the cost from participants. One committee member suggested that it should be put out for bid to create the course, and that the creator should not expect to recoup the cost of creating the

course in the first year. Mr. Baker asked Mr. Toth to contact RAB once again to get information on course development and approval for the next teleconference.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Mr. Baker informed the committee that he had responded to the Virginia NELAC workgroup. The committee will discuss this in the next teleconference. He also informed the committee that he had received comments from Mr. Gary Bennett regarding the Organic Technical Training Course. Mr. Bennett noted that nowhere in Chapter 3 (On-Site Assessment) does it state that assessors need to be certified. It only states that assessors will pass a course. The committee discussed briefly what it means to pass a course. They noted that assessors will be “approved,” but not “certified” since the word “certified” has a certain meaning in the International Standardization Organization (ISO) community.

CONCLUSION

The next committee teleconference was tentatively scheduled for Thursday, February 18, 1999. Mr. Baker will communicate the specific dial-in details to the committee.

**ACTION ITEMS
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE TELECONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 1, 1999**

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Mr. Bill Toth will contact RAB to get information about course development and approval.	2/18/99
2.	Committee will submit item-by-item comments on the GC-VOC checklist to Mr. Steve Baker	2/18/99

**PARTICIPANTS
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE TELECONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 1, 1999**

Name	Affiliation	Phone/Fax/E-mail
Mr. Steven Baker, Chair	Arizona Department of Health	T: 602-255-3454 F: 602-255-3462 E: sbaker@hs.state.az.us
Ms. Rosanna Buhl	Battelle Ocean Sciences	T: 781-934-0571 F: 781-934-2124 E: buhl@batelle.org
Mr. R. Wayne Davis	South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control	T: 803-935-7025 F: 803-935-6859 E: davisrw@columb36.dhec.state.sc.us
Mr. Charles Dyer	New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services	T: 603-271-2991 F: 603-271-2867 E: c_dyer@des.state.nh.us
Mr. Jack Hall	Quanterra, Inc.	T: 423-588-6401 F: 423-584-4315 E: hallj@quanterra.com
Mr. Stan Morton (absent)	US Department of Energy	T: 208-526-2186 F: 208-526-5964 E: mortonjs@lnel.gov
Ms. Marlene Patillo (absent)	Maryland Department of Environmental Health	T: 410-631-3646 F: 410-631-3733 E: mpatillo@mde.state.md.us
Ms. Athene Steinke	EA Laboratories	T: 410-771-4920 F: 410-771-4407 E: asteinke@eaest.com
Mr. William Toth, Jr.	Worldwide Solutions for Tomorrow	T: 301-668-0499 F: 301-924-4594 E: btoth@erols.com
Ms. Kelly Wilson	CT&E Environmental Services, Inc.	T: 616-843-1877 F: 616-845-9942 E: tviers@voyager.net
Ms. Lisa Greene (Contractor Support)	Research Triangle Institute	T: 919-541-7483 F: 919-541-7386 E: lcg@rti.org